

# **BOARD MEETING RESCUE KIT**

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## **20 Ideas for Jumpstarting Your Board Meetings**

***The following excerpt is summarized by Rose Snyder with permission from Board Source and taken from the publication by the same name.***

**I**n today's busy world getting and keeping good volunteers and board members is increasingly difficult. Therefore, it is more important than ever to maximize the activities of the board by making meetings more effective, productive and an efficient use of everyone's time.

The goal of board meetings is to provide an opportunity for the board to get an accurate and complete report on what's going on within the organization. We all know that board meetings are sometimes more dreaded than taxes – OK, not that much – but we realize it is not always the most efficient use of time. Participating on a board should be fun. This means that the board members should have the opportunity to feel like a “team” and get to know the team members. In the end, all board members have at least one thing in common – an interest in the mission of the organization.

While these ideas may or may not relate to the way your unit is run, hopefully they will get you to think about ways you can help your board, and ultimately your unit, be more effective.

The 20 ideas are summarized in four key areas: what boards can do before, during and after meetings, as well as ideas on what should be done on an ongoing basis.

### **BEFORE THE MEETING**

#### **1. Establish rules of conduct.**

- √ *Ensure that everyone agrees on how to work together by setting basic ground rules.*
- √ *Stress the importance of respect at and away from the board table.*
- √ *Agree on how to disagree.*

#### **2. Draft recommendations.**

- √ *Save time during board meetings by preparing draft board recommendations in advance, when appropriate.*

#### **3. Require some advance reading.**

- √ *Make board training a priority at every meeting.*
- √ *Provide the appropriate materials.*
- √ *Give board members a broad overview of the organization at least once (in a binder) and include at least the following:*
  - ▶ *The organization: the mission and history*
  - ▶ *The board: a roster of current members, job descriptions, a statement of responsibility, term limits, etc.*
  - ▶ *Committees: job descriptions and a listing for standing committees and task forces*
  - ▶ *Legal documents and policies*
  - ▶ *Finances: appropriate financial statements and a copy of the budget*
  - ▶ *Strategic framework: a summary of the organization's strategic framework, an annual operating plan and the long- and short-term goals of the organization*
  - ▶ *Programs and services: an overview of the organization's programs and services, a staff list (if appropriate) with job titles*
  - ▶ *Upcoming events: a calendar of special events and board meetings*
- √ *Give the board supplemental information before every meeting.*
- √ *Keep the meeting short and sweet.*

## **DURING THE MEETING**

### **4. Stay on topic.**

- √ *Clearly define the outcome you wish to achieve during the meeting to prevent lengthy, unfocused discussions.*
- √ *Make sure everyone understands each task before the board.*
- √ *Don't let the board get sidetracked by personal issues.*

### **5. Use consent agendas.**

- √ *To save time, combine routine items into one item for the board's approval.*
  - ▶ *Committee and previous board minutes*
  - ▶ *Minor changes in procedure*
  - ▶ *Routine revisions of a policy*
  - ▶ *Updating documents*
  - ▶ *Standing contracts that are regularly used*
  - ▶ *Confirmation of conventional actions that are required by the bylaws*
- √ *Ease your board into using consent agendas until everyone is comfortable with the idea*

### **6. Focus on decision making.**

- √ *Change the format of the meetings from show-and-tell to give-and-take.*
- √ *Give the board important work to do.*
- √ *Clarify how the board makes decisions.*

### **7. Involve all board members.**

- √ *Everyone should have the opportunity to speak.*

### **8. Make sure the facilitator remains neutral.**

- √ *Don't be afraid to let someone else take over.*

### **9. Hold meetings at a suitable site.**

- √ *Try holding some meetings on site to help board members connect with the organization's mission.*
- √ *Vary the meeting site throughout the year.*
- √ *Seek a quiet place.*

### **10. Consider the seating arrangements.**

- √ *Choose an appropriate room setup.*
- √ *Sit in such a way to promote teamwork not factions.*

### **11. Keep finances understandable.**

- √ *Know how much is too much.*
- √ *Make sure the financial reports the board receives are timely and accurate.*
- √ *Teach the board to look for expenses or income that is significantly over or under the budget.*

### **12. Focus on the mission.**

√ *Provide context to board meetings by reminding the board of the organization's mission.*

**13. Make the most of the minutes.**

- √ *Include the basics.*
- √ *Don't provide too much detail.*
- √ *Record information that could be helpful during a legal review.*
- √ *Circulate the minutes a few days after the meeting.*

**14. Let the board members learn from others.**

√ *Stress that interactive learning is as important for longtime members as it is for new board members.*

**15. Have a good time.**

√ *Never underestimate the power of humor.*

**AFTER THE MEETING**

**16. Encourage reflection.**

- √ *Critique meetings.*
- √ *Conduct a board self-assessment every three years.*
- √ *Conduct a board member self-evaluation.*

**17. Encourage good attendance.**

- √ *Develop a meeting structure.*
- √ *Start and end on time.*
- √ *Set meeting dates far in advance.*
- √ *Follow up with no-shows.*
- √ *Establish attendance policies to ensure regular attendance, and stick to it*
- √ *Ask board members for feedback on meeting dates.*

**18. Encourage relationship building.**

- √ *Schedule breaks.*
- √ *Acknowledge milestones such as birthdays, anniversaries, promotions or retirements.*

**19. Get help when you need it.**

√ *Seek a consultant or mediator when necessary.*

**20. Encourage open communication.**

- √ *Discuss the matters that keep the chief executive or president awake at night.*
- √ *Hold team building sessions.*